



OPEN COMMUNITIES ALLIANCE

Testimony of Erin Boggs, Esq.
before the Housing Committee
March 9, 2022

**Written Testimony regarding H.B. 5204,
An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities
to Increase Affordable Housing**

Thank you to the leadership and members of the Housing Committee for the opportunity to testify. My name is Erin Boggs, and I am the Executive Director of Open Communities Alliance (OCA), a civil rights non-profit organization that promotes equitable access to housing across Connecticut. OCA is also a proud member of the Steering Committee of Growing Together CT, a statewide consortium of organizations dedicated to tackling residential segregation and its impact through equitable investments in under-resourced communities and expanded affordable housing choices in all parts of the state.

I am testifying in support of H.B. 5204, An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing. This proposal, modeled on an effective system in New Jersey, asks every town in Connecticut to plan and zone for its fair share of affordable housing. The fair share approach to planning and zoning is the right thing to do to address a range of social justice issues in Connecticut. It is also the smart thing to do to boost our economy and put our state on a more sustainable path.

The Cost of Housing. Housing - and housing segregation - has never been so expensive. Connecticut is one of the costliest places to live in the country - we have the 10th highest housing costs, so one might expect our economy to be bursting with high-quality jobs attracting workers from across the country. Instead, the state's workforce has dropped by 92,000 people since this time last year. Even worse, Connecticut is close to last in economic and population growth in the country. It's not a coincidence that Connecticut is also one of the most segregated states in the country. Our broken local housing policies lead to segregation and economic stagnation - and we pay for it through the nose.

Our economy cannot grow - our businesses cannot thrive - if workers don't have a place to live. In the CBIA's 2021 Survey of Connecticut Businesses, 79% of employers responded that it is difficult to find workers. It makes sense, then, that more employers said they would make a greater investment in employee retention than anything else. The state's business leaders see what is at stake here – their very ability to do business. Businesses need better housing policies across our state.

The Solution: Fair Share Planning and Zoning. H.B. 5204 would implement a new statewide housing policy framework based on an effective process in New Jersey.¹ Fair Share puts municipalities in the driver's seat by empowering them to plan for their fair share of the regional need for affordable housing over a 10-year period, allowing families earning up to 80% of median income (or \$80,000 a year for a family of four) to access housing at reasonable cost. The approach also ensures that towns include room for housing that is missing from the market - housing at a range of costs all the way down to 30% (around \$30,000), have two or more bedrooms, supportive services or are accessible to individuals with mobility challenges.

We've learned a lot from New Jersey's experience with its Fair Share system, which has been honed through trial and error over the past 50 years, to emerge as a system on the path to generate 300,000 units of affordable and market rate housing. The same kind of production in Connecticut would likely yield tens of billions of dollars in income for Connecticut residents and tens of billions in state and local tax revenues. More than that, it would set Connecticut up to be a great place to live for generations to come by providing housing options, attracting employers, reversing decades of outmigration, and encourage development strategies that are better for the environment.

Here is how fair share works. Very simply, the fair share approach generates an estimate of the need for affordable housing by regions, then allocates those regional needs to towns based on per capita median income, town wealth (in the form of its grand list), multifamily housing percentage, and poverty rate. Using these factors, town goals can be generated that take imbalances into account, such as some municipalities hosting the bulk of the regions affordable housing needs and other towns hosting almost none.

Towns are then asked to plan and zone to achieve their fair share allocation in 10 years. Because greater input from a range of stakeholders is essential, the exact form and contents of those plans will be determined by the Office of Policy and Management with the option of

¹ Bonnie Watson-Coleman, Affordable housing builds on a civil rights foundation to integrate N.J., New Jersey.com, July 26, 2018. Available at https://www.nj.com/opinion/2018/07/legislature_must_build_on_strong_civil_rights_foun.html.

consulting with experts and advocates, something we would strongly recommend. Similarly, the bill envisions OPM offering recommendations on an enforcement process.

In conclusion, Fair Share is the right thing to do because in one fell swoop it allows Connecticut to take major strides in addressing its affordable housing and housing segregation crises and jumpstarts our economy, all while ensuring that towns remain in the planning and zoning driver's seat. The lack of housing affordable to a range of income types located in a balanced way across the state has Connecticut in a stranglehold. Fair Share will put us on a path to fix that – right social wrongs and strengthening the economy. It is the right thing and the smart thing to do for our state.